

Interview with Ms. Ann Bushnell

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

Foreign Service Spouse Series

ANN BUSHNELL

Interviewed by: Pamela Stratton

Initial interview date: August 5, 1997

Copyright 2007 ADST

Q: It is August the 5th, 1997. I am in AAFSW offices on MacArthur Boulevard. This is Pam Stratton again and Ann Bushnell has arrived and we are ready to get started on the interview. Ann, the first thing I want to ask you is about your early years before you were in the Foreign Service. And I'd be interested in knowing where you were born and where you were raised?

BUSHNELL: Thank you Pam. Good morning. I grew up in a small town in New Jersey in the New York Metropolitan area, and I met John when he was already in his first assignment here in Washington in 1961. It's interesting because, when it looked like we were serious with each other, he said there's only one problem I see and that is that I have this career in the Foreign Service and would be dragging you all over the world. And I said, "Indeed, that's no problem", that was something I was looking forward to. And it was rather a surprise to him. Actually when I was 21, I had taken a student tour of Europe, and in my family, from a small town, this was for my father quite a departure from the norm. I was always quite independent actually.

Library of Congress

Q: How did you come to Washington? What were you doing in Washington when you met.

BUSHNELL: Well, we actually met at the New Jersey shore where I spent most of my time every summer, as much as I could. And he was there visiting a buddy from college.

Q: But then did you move to Washington or did you come to Washington to be married.

BUSHNELL: No, when we got married, I moved here.

Q: I see. So then, you spend about two months in D.C. before you were whisked off to Bogota, is that correct?

BUSHNELL: Right.

Q: And was Bogota then a developing country? Was it a great cultural adjustment for you? What was it like in Bogota?

BUSHNELL: Well, actually, it was a developing country, but Bogota was rather a very refreshing place to arrive to because of the way we arrived. We had taken a Grace line ship, half freight, half passenger from New York to the West coast of Colombia, to the Port of Buenaventura where it is very — well, the wild West is civilized in comparison. When the captain of our ship heard we were getting off to stay overnight there, he was very concerned and exclaimed: “No, no really. You must, of course, come back to the ship for dinner, don't try to eat in town.” Well, we soon knew exactly what he was talking about. It was hard to find a building that wasn't dilapidated. We stayed at the best hotel in town, and the shutters on the bedroom window were all broken. There was no toilet seat on the toilet. The beds were at best, bunk beds. So, we did take him up on his invitation to go back to the ship for dinner. During dinner he told us that any of the sailors that leave the ship are allowed only to go to an area where there are vigilantes, which is the private police force, because it's just so deprived and dangerous . Anyway, we survived the night and got on the train the next morning to go up to Cali, where we were then going to take

Library of Congress

a plane to Bogota. The half day train ride through the jungle of Western Colombia was extremely hot, but the exotic panorama passing by the train was too awesome to be bothered by the heat. It wasn't until we were at least an hour into the jungle that I noticed there were bullet holes in the windows which John was hoping I wouldn't see! But it was a marvelously interesting experience. And to see naked natives from the jungle waving to us, with hesitant smiles — indeed the only bit of civilization I suppose they know. So when we got to Cali, we were a much, much closer step to a developed country, and Bogota even more so. But that was a very interesting arrival; all the more emotional to one who is two months pregnant.

Q: Well, I'd be interested in knowing, did they have adequate birthing facilities in Bogota?

BUSHNELL: For the...

Q: For the birth of your first child?

BUSHNELL: Oh, yes, far more than adequate. In fact the clinic where he was born was for the upper class, this being a society where you're either upper class or lower class — there is little middle class — we were of the upper class. I was taken to a clinic that was almost brand new, and what took my husband's time was the waiter in black tie who appeared in my private room to ask John what he'd have for dinner, and was champagne to be included!

Q: Was your housing adequate, was it extravagant? What kind of housing did you end up in?

BUSHNELL: We had a very nice apartment. It was, by our standards, very large - three bedrooms and good size. Yes, we were happy in this apartment. It was safer than a house — there's an awful lot of robberies, and we were up off the street floor, so that was a help in itself. It was perfectly fine, Yes.

Library of Congress

Q: Were the two years you spent there uneventful? Or was it a time when you were just family oriented and learning about the Foreign Service? Or is there anything you can recollect as being outstanding during that period?

BUSHNELL: Well, I was enjoying Spanish class, which I very badly needed, and it's absolutely essential as far as I'm concerned that one gets some fluency in the language. The contact with my Spanish teacher, a Colombian aristocrat, (I recall that her uncle was the Cardinal), was an opening to a lot of the Colombian culture for me, because of her keen interest in teaching us more than the language. We did a lot of traveling when we could. We went to many of the cities that we could get to over the mountain passes and so forth by car. And we just took advantage of getting about as best we could.

Q: Do you recollect anything unusual during the time when President Kennedy was assassinated? That happened in 1963 when you were in Bogota?

BUSHNELL: Yes. John was recovering from a terrible illness. He had gotten infectious mononucleosis, and the doctor misdiagnosed it as typhoid. And he was really quite ill, more from the treatment with the wrong antibiotic than the infectious mononucleosis I think.. He lost a lot of weight. When he was recovering, the doctor recommended that we go to a lower altitude. We were fortunate to use, through a Colombian contact, a Colombian's weekend house in a sleepy little town about halfway down to sea level from the altitude of Bogota. The town was fairly deserted because it was not the season of the year for it to be used. We were sitting around peacefully one morning when the maid came scurrying in and said: "Oh Senor, the President has been shot". Well, so why is she so excited? I mean, really, this is not too uncommon a happening in Latin American developing countries. So, luckily we had a little radio with us and we turned it on. In no time, we realized that it was our own President. And he was not dead yet, that's how quickly we found out. Now how it happened that she had heard, was that we had diplomatic plates on our car, of course. And there was someone bicycling around with a radio who noticed our plates and thought: "Now, they probably want to know this." And he

Library of Congress

came in and told the maid which she immediately relayed the news to us. Then, our trip back to Bogota was unbelievably impressive. We left the next day because we thought we should get back to the embassy. Even in the littlest villages along the mountain's unpaved roads, there were pictures of President Kennedy outside of the most modest of houses, shacks in many cases, hung with the black draping around it. And, if there was an American flag, the flag was there. It was really very touching.

Q: So there was an outpouring of sympathy.

BUSHNELL: Oh, indeed it was quite an experience for us.

Q: What about the trip up the Choco River five days is a long time.

BUSHNELL: As you may know, there is a Pan American Highway which begins in the United States and goes all the way to Argentina, but is interrupted south of Panama City and picks-up again in Colombia. While there were political reasons between the two countries for not favoring the connection, as well as the fear that hoof and mouth diseased cattle could easily come north, the main reason was the dense, very dense jungle of Northern Colombia and Eastern Panama. We did a five day trip into that dense rain forest jungle, in a flat-bottom harbor boat, I think it was, which had no sleeping accommodations. We were invited to go on this trip by a Colombian who had been a Presidential candidate just before that. He was doing this expedition with some botanists from the university in Bogota, to study wood in order to develop more hardwood for their lumber industry and eventually for foreign trade, etc. Somehow John got invited as did another American from AID and his wife. There must have been a total of 15 or so of us on the trip, all Colombian except the four of us Americans. At night I slept with two others on the only three wooden benches that were on a covered area of the deck. (One does not find beds on a harbor boat.) Others used hammocks, if they then could find a place to hang one. In the intense tropical heat, with all the bugs that go with it, and the apprehensive silence broken by the noise of every creature that ever comes out at night in

Library of Congress

the jungle, we slept! We lived on this boat for 5 days. And we had a wonderful time, as one often does in this kind of extraordinary “make the most of it” situation; camaraderie with everyone while bravely bonding together. I remember the evening (must have been the last or next to the last one,) when the cook said that we were down to one egg, and asked who was going to have that last egg the next morning. We made up a song right on the spot about, “un solo huevo”, one egg only. And we sang it all evening! It's most interesting and ironical what happened when we went back to port after those five days; we had to stay overnight (you guessed it — in that uncivilized town of Buenaventura!) before we flew up to Bogota. We were in the same Hotel Estacion that we stayed in on our arrival, that first eerie night in the country. And now it was a luxury!!! The comparison, after that slab of wood for five nights with un solo huevo on the harbor boat, to this dilapidated hotel was heaven — what a marvelous, memorable experience. I remember being overwhelmed with joy to find that there was a shower (down the hall) with a bar of soap!

Q: I didn't follow whether the trip was business or pleasure?

BUSHNELL: That's an interesting question because I believe it was a little of both. I think probably our AID and Alliance For Progress program connection was relative to their developing what resources they might have in the jungle . John worked both in the Economic Section of the Embassy and in AID, and the organizers perhaps hoped he would interest U.S. investors in the project.

Q: Interesting. I noticed that your next assignment was to Santo Domingo and that you spent a fairly short time there - was it just one year?

BUSHNELL: Yes, they had the civil war in 1965, and during that time I was evacuated with an infant and a toddler. When we could finally go back, after approximately two to three months, we were soon after assigned out which is what usually happens to embassy personnel after such drastic changes in both official Americans there and officials of the host country.

Library of Congress

Q: So they evacuated Americans because of the civil war. However, while you were there, you have a couple of interesting stories about your children. One I'd like to hear about is the sandbox in the dining room— could you give me a little bit on that one.

BUSHNELL: Well this was just a day or two before we were evacuated, and there were planes strafing the city. Actually there were bullets going in all directions from the planes. John called from the Embassy and said: "Don't go outside of the house, don't go outside of the house for anything" . And I said, "Well, Juanito is out in his sandbox, you know how he is about that." "Get him in the house" he stressed. Well I went out, and I found him not at all agreeable. He was really upset. Well I thought, here I've got to improvise. So, with a bucket found nearby, I got many pails of sand, and I plopped them on what was actually a stone floor in the dining room. So there was a nice mound of sand for him, and he was perfectly happy. In came his pail and shovel, and there it all stayed. After we were evacuated, John had to move to different quarters. When he finally could go back to the house, it was still there like we never left it (laughter). Not only that, he had invited two or more dignitaries from the Defense and State Departments to stay in the house . I remember one was Adam Yarmolinsky because we later found a handkerchief with AY on it. No maid, unmade beds, just like we up and ran off, sand box in dining room to boot. The freezer was a horror of rotten food from no electricity. At times I still choke-up relating it.

Q: Also during this short period, I recollect that you said your son had a christening party crashed by an important visitor?

BUSHNELL: Oh, indeed. That was something. Well, Mark was only two weeks old when we decided to have him baptized early because my parents had come. I had had a difficult delivery. (The clinic there was nothing like the one in Bogota.) We decided to have a very small, low-key, very low- key gathering after the baptism with my parents and maybe a half a dozen other people, not imposing on any protocol. I think John actually invited his immediate supervisor, who was the head of the Economic Section, and a few friends, and that was it. I had gotten a sheet cake. That afternoon, before the small celebration,

Library of Congress

John called from the Presidential Palace where he was again and again meeting with the Dominicans to deal with this pending revolution crisis, to say that there was a man there who would be coming over to use our phone — this was just before the revolution and things were unsettled to say the least. Would I let this man, Pancho, in to use our phone. When he came he was very exuberant as he noticed the baptismal decorated sheet cake and exclaimed: “Oh, it looks like you're having a party!” And I said: “Well our baby is being baptized later this afternoon, and we're having a few friends in.” “John didn't tell me” he exclaimed! And Pancho makes his phone calls with a lot of code words and so forth, and stays a long time. Finally he goes back to the Presidential Palace and tells the President that the Bushnells are having a christening party tonight” And the President says: “Well, aren't we invited?” Pancho then calls John who has no choice but to extend an invitation. Well, here we are a few hours from the party and John, of course, has to immediately inform our Ambassador, whom we did not impose an invitation on, and of course he has to come because the President is coming.

The President (Head of the governing Triumvirate) and a dozen or more staff and military aides arrived, bearing many gifts. The second member of the Triumvirate didn't come, but he sent gifts. There were security vehicles all around the block, and here was our maid in her rollers and my mother, not speaking Spanish, is trying to tell her to take the rollers out of her hair. We had an hour or so of this in our modest, very modest home and garden. Our Ambassador, Tapley Bennett, took me aside in the garden and said: “Ann, I have to talk to you about the gifts that they brought and what you can keep and what you can't keep, and how you deal with it.” I was certainly glad to get his guidance as John had just commented that we could not keep gifts from the government. (The consumables; cognac, perfume, and the sterling silver baby gifts I could keep. The movie camera had to be returned. Later a thank you note for it, not mentioning what the gift was, was to be sent to the giver.)

Q: Moving on to San Jose in 1965, this is a period in which you spent three years at post and I guess I'm interested in finding out 1) at this point your Spanish language skills must

Library of Congress

have been getting better from your initial training and was it useful to you at all during the years in San Jose?

BUSHNELL: Oh yes, yes indeed. I wouldn't have done it any differently. I went to class right away when I got to Costa Rica.. In the Dominican Republic, I didn't have an opportunity to go to Spanish class because the class was full. It was just as well because their Spanish was so stilted, dropping letters, what have you. Fortunately, it was only a year's time, much of which I was pregnant or evacuated So I was anxious to get back into class, and I stayed in class the whole three years I was there except for a period of time when our third child was born.

Q: So your third child was born in San Jose.

BUSHNELL: Right.

Q: And was this another developing country or was this more advanced than the previous two? How would you rank it?

BUSHNELL: Developing in many ways, but the literacy rate is much higher and I think there is, certainly, some semblance of middle class. But for all economic purposes, it's developing.

Q: Well, you didn't need to be evacuated on account of your pregnancy or anything like that? There were adequate facilities?

BUSHNELL: No, no, no. The doctor, the clinic, everything was very acceptable. Yes, a very agreeable experience.

Q: Well, with all the representation that you did in San Jose, again I would think that language might have come in handy because your responsibilities were picking up.

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Yes, we did entertain a lot of Costa Ricans officially. John wore two hats, working both for AID and the State Department, so he had more responsibilities in that way. And of course the Alliance for Progress was new and Central America was very involved in development through the Alliance for Progress, and John was very directly involved in that.

Q: The Embassy's Women's Club of which you were President — were you President for the entire three years or a portion of that.

BUSHNELL: I think it was two years actually.

Q: What kind of charities did you support with the club?

BUSHNELL: We did help several, but we focused on one which was Hogar Infantil, an orphanage for little ones. We had an annual fundraiser which was very popular. It was a dinner/dance, and we also volunteered at the Hogar — we had volunteers who actually went and helped out. This was a very rewarding experience to be directly involved with the little ones, Costa Ricans other than the Costa Ricans at the official level who were coming to my house for dinner.

Q: What was the result of the dance, for example. Did it result in funds that you turned over, is that it?

BUSHNELL: Everything that we raised through the fundraiser was basically, almost totally for them. As I recall we had some minor charities that we gave a little bit to , but it was largely for the Hogar.

Q: I think, by this time in history, there were not a lot of orphanages in the United States. Was this kind of an unusual thing in San Jose, were there a lot of children orphaned?

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Well, there's an awful lot of illegitimate births, but there's not such extreme poverty as one would find, for instance, in Colombia or in the Dominican Republic. But there is still a number of needy, and infants without a parent.

Q: Is San Jose a particularly religious country? Does it have a State religion?

BUSHNELL: Yes, the official religion is, of course, Roman Catholic. And everybody is a Catholic. I don't think there was yet as much Protestant missionary influence as there is today. I don't seem to recall it so much anyway. Of course, in Latin America, the men aren't so much churchgoers as they are definitely declared as Catholics. It isn't that they would be anything else. We did befriend the American priests who were in the area and then, interestingly, the girl's high school academy that I attended in New Jersey, the Mother House of the Sisters of Mercy, sent some nuns to San Jose as missionaries. When I discovered this I located them in the outskirts and we did some things together with them after that. It was interesting to see the North American Catholic Church helping. In this particular case, it was like our Habitat For Humanity; a lot of self help guided by American missionaries and expertise.

Q: How was the health of your children, and your husband and yourself during the years in San Jose - any major illnesses?

BUSHNELL: No, once John got over his Colombia experience all of us had very good health. The climate was quite agreeable, and we had, of course, the wonderful enjoyment of the fruits and fresh produce that these countries have — the pineapple in Costa Rica is something I have never found as good anywhere.

Q: What about traveling in San Jose - I know the children were small, but did you get to see the country at all during that period?

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Yes, but not with the children so much. Remember that it's par for the course to have live-in-help. John and I did take the train to the Atlantic coast, through thick jungle, which was before a road had been built. A marvelous experience. The Atlantic coast was terribly underdeveloped. Terribly uncivilized. The hotel was a poor excuse for a place to stay, but the trip was a good experience. On the Pacific coast we did find a beach area with adequate accommodations.

Q: Have you been back there since?

BUSHNELL: No, but we're planning to go in December.

Q: Interesting. I would like to move on to Geneva, which you went to directly from San Jose. Now you've been overseas for about seven or eight years by this point and you're next off to Geneva. And this had to be some real cultural adaptation. Geneva is a lot different than your posts in Latin America and I'm wondering whether or not you had a cultural adaptation — or what came to you as being the difference between where you were then and where you were now located in Geneva?

BUSHNELL: Well, yes, it was a tremendous adjustment. It was just absolutely tremendous in so many ways. First of all, the Swiss are not happy with foreigners — I hate to start out on a negative note, but.... They do things very, very well, but one doesn't learn their ways easily because they are not very helpful. The language, of course, was different, and I started in French class right away. My high school French was not much to speak of. The biggest adjustment, I guess, on the domestic scene was that until Geneva I'd had live-in help; I'd never had children without live-in help because in Latin America to have live-in help is the status quo. Not so in Switzerland! Now I have three — the youngest is two and a half and the oldest is five and a half. I have three pre-schoolers and everywhere I go I have to take them. Of course, this is quite an adjustment. The other thing is that my oldest had finished kindergarten in Costa Rica in December which is the end of their school year. We arrived in January and first grade didn't start till September. So I had three with me

Library of Congress

constantly. I remember one thing very vividly. After three months in a temporary residence, we found a house to rent. After another three months, six months in all, when I thought I must have aged ten years through this move, I remember coming home from Mass one Sunday, with the biggest, happiest smile; elated, exuberant. I walked in the house and said: "John, I saw somebody at Mass I haven't seen since before I got married." He said: "Oh?." I said: "He recognized me". To me, that was the greatest lift, because I really didn't think I could look, after those six months, like anybody ever knew me to look. I'll never forget that. I can still see this man saying: "Aren't you Ann Morel?" I had worked with him at RCA before I got married.

Q: Oh, how interesting. I wanted to ask you about the story of your astonishing a policeman with your honesty - do you remember that story?

BUSHNELL: Oh, I do indeed. Well, Switzerland was a new experience in so many ways. First of all, I had always behaved in Latin America, like I was, indeed, a guest in the country as we are supposed to do. And I felt comfortable doing that. Of course, the Latin Americans were always very receptive of us. In Switzerland, you're treated just like every other foreigner — you're kind of not there! So it's deflating to the ego, which in some ways is probably good. But the total disinterest in anything we might be doing or interrelating with the Swiss, you know, forget it. So actually, to try to be on my best behavior as a guest in the country was slowly going out the window. I was in the car one day in town, carefully trying to round the bend of a very narrow street. Much to my horror, the tight fit found me sideswiping a parked car. Oh dear, I wasn't happy with myself for that. So I left a note on his steering wheel, leaving my name and phone number, and saying that I was sorry that I had dented the door of his car. He called me that night. He had a foreign accent his French wasn't very good — but I didn't pay too much attention to that. I got his request, and I told him I'd call him back — or he should call me back when he got an estimate of how much the door repair would cost, and I'd send him the money for the repair. He did that and told me it would be, I think it was 52 francs as I recall, which was the equivalent of nothing — maybe 15 dollars then. I went to the post office and sent him a money order.

Library of Congress

A couple of weeks later, he phoned and said: "Madame, I did not get the money". I said: "Well, I did send it to you. Let me confirm your address again". He gave it to me. At this point I detected that maybe he spoke Spanish better, and I switched to Spanish and he did. He was Italian, Seraphini Caldis was his name — I remember it so well. So I sent him again the 52 francs. About a month later I get a telephone call and it's the police: "Madame Bushnell — you damaged the car of this Monsieur Caldis? " "Yes" I said . "And you are admitting that you did that?" (He was shocked that I was admitting it) and I said: "Yes". I explained what I had done. He said: "Well, he's never gotten the money, and he wants you to see that he gets it". I said: "Well, fine." Then the policeman told me that he had neglected to tell me that he was an immigrant worker from Italy, and completely unknown, that I needed to put "care of the owner's name" at the address where he was renting a room. The policeman said: "Well, Madame, that's fine — now I'm assuring this man that you are going to send him the 52 francs and it's going to come to the address that I've now given you." "Yes, of course, fine." "Well, then he says to me: "Tell me what nationality are you Madam?" And I said: "Je suis Americaine" I am American. "Oh," he exclaimed, "I am so happy to have this wonderful experience with an American!" "Voila!" I exclaimed as I hung up the phone and thought that without even trying, maybe I have indeed done something good for the American image in Switzerland!

Q: The other thing I wanted to ask you about was you said that you recollected that it was quite exciting in Geneva when the United States put a man on the moon—could you tell me what you recollect about that time?

BUSHNELL: The neighborhood where we lived was entirely Swiss. It was a lovely little neighborhood of small houses, but the neighbors were not friendly. They would politely say: "bonjour Madame, sa va?" And that would be all. Well, the morning after the moon landing, I had three or four of my Swiss neighbors come to me "Oh Madame Bushnell, congratulations — we are so excited — it's marvelous". I was so pleased.. Indeed, suddenly these strictly cordial Swiss had emotion!

Library of Congress

Q: It was a high point for America as you could tell by the reaction of your neighbors.

BUSHNELL: Exactly. But I do want to say that for a foreigner, life in Switzerland, and in Geneva in particular is very impersonal. This perhaps can be explained by the fact that the UN is in Geneva and that necessitates a lot of foreigners living there, like ourselves. It wasn't because we were American, or because we were doing anything wrong, other than the fact that I was taking three toddlers everywhere in a country where most families have one child only. Generally the atmosphere was cool, even in our U.S. Mission, which was big, it was a different atmosphere than in our Embassy in an underdeveloped Latin American country; both impersonal and inattentive.

Q: I had been told in Geneva that any man or woman on the street felt more or less free to correct children who were misbehaving in public, is that correct?

BUSHNELL: Absolutely. And I have a horror story if I may.

Q: Yes

BUSHNELL: We didn't officially entertain much there because it's not really required. But we were having a dinner party one night, and I had to run to the store that afternoon to get two last-minute things I had forgotten. I put the children in the car — the younger two. The oldest was now in school. I went to the supermarket and parked right near the entrance. Before quickly leaving the car to dash in I said to them: "I just have to go in for two things, please do not leave the car, I will be right back". I went in and collected my two items quickly. As I'm coming to the cash register, I hear a child screaming. I look over and it's my youngest in the arms of a stranger. I just don't remember anything about the items, so I probably dropped them, might have even broken them, I don't know. I just dashed, grabbed him, and there must have been at least a dozen people around. They are severely accusing me; all telling me that I have broken the law with strong reminders, and shaking fingers, that one doesn't leave anyone under 12 in the car without an adult! never!

Library of Congress

Of course I'm a foreigner, and, if they had seen the diplomatic plates on my car, perhaps that even helped them to realize that this is someone who doesn't know the rules and needs to be taught a lesson. Whatever the thinking, I was, of course, at my worst with my French because of the emotional experience, and I just grabbed my child and ran. He was beside himself with fright. Of course, when I got him to the car, his brother, 4, was also hysterical that this stranger had taken his brother. Well, it took me a while to get over that. That was just absolutely unbearable.

Q: Well, you were probably less upset by the time your dinner party rolled around. I understand that Geneva is very beautiful. Did you get to travel any?

BUSHNELL: We did. And the food is wonderful everywhere in Western Europe. We were perfectly located to do trips to all surrounding countries for several days at a time.— absolutely a very, very good experience in many ways. And we were fortunate in finding a Swiss woman, a lovely lady, who was living alone and who spoke English. When we found Madame “Grandma” Grobet , she would come and stay with the boys and take care of their every need, including car pooling to schools.

Q: So things got better?

BUSHNELL: Yes.

Q: Following Geneva you went to the National Security Council—I assume that's back to Washington? And sort of started a long period in Washington. But many people say they suffer from reentry shock. Did that happen to you at all—reentry to the United States after being abroad for so long?

BUSHNELL: Well, there's culture shock every time we'd come back. And yes, there was.

Q: Had things changed?

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Well, yes. I remember coming back to live here for the first time since I was just married. . I was only married two months when I went overseas, and now for the first time with children. So I wasn't used to being the wife and mother in the United States. I do remember going to the supermarket and having to devote a whole half a day because there were so many choices. You didn't just buy mustard, you had to select from about eight different kinds. I was experienced with selecting from only one or two choices. It was a dreadful thing until I got used to shopping. Then there was the other big culture shock that same re-entry; moving from the speeding traffic around Geneva and all surrounding areas , I could barely manage the patience I needed to drive as slowly as I found the Americans driving.

Q: They drive slowly here? In the United States.

BUSHNELL: Oh, indeed. Oh it drove me crazy. But I don't remember it as being a difficult time so much. I think settling-into Geneva was. Then everything was easy after that.

Q: I see. Well during this period, 1973 to 1977 you were active in AAFSW as the Language Groups Coordinator. Can you tell me something about that service?

BUSHNELL: Well, having appreciated so much the language fluency I acquired overseas, I didn't want to lose it. I immediately joined a Spanish conversation group. My French never really got off the ground very well because everybody speaks English in Geneva and doesn't let you speak French with a foreign accent. So I got active in the language groups, and I don't remember how it came along that AAFSW needed somebody to coordinate the groups, and I did that for several years.

Q: I don't really understand what the function of the groups are? Are they discussion groups?

BUSHNELL: Right. You get together just to speak the language.

Library of Congress

Q: So the French—there's a French group; and the Spanish group?

BUSHNELL: An Italian and a German also. At the time there were the four. Now I think there's only two, I'm not sure.

Q: And your job as Coordinator was just to gather the members?

BUSHNELL: To keep in touch with them, or to facilitate placement to a group. The French group expanded to a second for one thing. And then I would usually get invited to each group once a year just to, you know, as a gesture more than anything else. And if there were too many of the members that were lax in their membership in AAFSW, I urged them to be sure and remember that they ought to be joining. .

Q: When you said the French group extended to a second, do you mean two French groups?

BUSHNELL: Right.

Q: I really want to discuss the 1972 Directive and I don't know if this is the appropriate place to do that because it was issued in 1972 which is during your period in Washington. But I would be interested in hearing your experience at this point because I have not asked you about your posts in terms of whether or not you had dragon ladies at post, whether you were asked to do things that you were unwilling to do, and whether or not the Directive which took that off of the shoulders of the spouses, whether or not the Directive helped you, hurt you, did not make a difference or whatever. And so, could I have your opinion on that?

BUSHNELL: First of all I did not have a dragon lady (a demanding Ambassador's wife). I was fortunate. The one that might have come the closest, and was considered one by others, never really bothered me because I was pregnant most of the time that she was there. So no, I didn't have a problem. I was, of course, rated on my husband's efficiency

Library of Congress

report which I don't think really made much of an impact on me. When I arrived in my first three countries, I was newly pregnant each time, went through that and then had a baby. So I kind of could stay pretty much on the outskirts with a legitimate reason. I think I did that without going to any extremes. I enjoyed entertaining which, being a junior officer, wasn't awfully demanding yet. I very much enjoyed language learning. In fact, in Bogota the class wasn't available straight away, so I went with another junior officer wife, to the Universidad Javeriana, the Jesuit university, just to get started on a Spanish course. We had fun doing that together. The thing that was interesting was the protocol requirement of calling, complete with engraved calling cards, on the wives of all official Americans in the Embassy that outranked you, and that was virtually everyone. Everybody outranked John it seemed. It was required that we wear hats and white gloves, which we did. We made fun of it; we kind of joked about it, and we kind of hated it, but we did it. And you know something? it was a good experience. Phyllis and I, (she was my language class companion at the University and about the only person in the entire embassy whose husband might have been outranked by John) became soul-mates as we trudged through all these "requirements", thus making it bearable and even to getting in a lot of silent laughs as we witnessed each other in our new "roles". While I understand now that the purpose of these calls was in itself useful; for the spouses of officials to meet and be aware of who the newly arrived spouses were. But it was, nonetheless, resented as an unfair demand at the time.

Q: But you said that you felt sorry for some of the people that felt disenfranchised by the 1972 Directive, could you...

BUSHNELL: I've heard horror stories that I believe. And I know of them happening where I was (again, because of my pregnancies I was not demanded of). But I do think that the 1972 Directive was, indeed, a thing of its time. It was needed. I also understand the feelings of the women who were saying at that time: "Oh, but look at how hard I've worked, now I won't get any credit for it. Why shouldn't that be reflected on my husband's report. It's the only thing we get — I don't get a salary from the State Department. It's the only

Library of Congress

recognition. There's nothing else official." OK, I was part of that too, but I don't know whether I was just out to lunch, but I don't remember feeling impacted at all by any of this one way or the other. I know, when I was here in Washington, I was part of a committee that was looking into the CLO Office getting off the ground, and naming it and so forth. I was active on the Board through being the Language Group Coordinator, and then I got to be the Assistant Treasurer, and I did Book fair treasury work and so forth. But I have a lot to be thankful for, for all the wonderful opportunities and learning experiences that I've had through the Foreign Service.

Q: So, personally, it wasn't a positive or a negative—it was just a creature of its time and you, more or less, welcomed it.

BUSHNELL: I think it was needed. Yes.

Q: OK, I would like to jump over these many years in Washington and sort of focus on the last five years in Washington while your husband was Deputy Assistant Secretary of ARA and I believe Principal DAS during that time, and ask you about your work as the Nominating Committee Chairwomen. Would you tell us about that—that was for AAFSW? Do you recollect what was going on at that time?

BUSHNELL: Right. Well, you know it was funny because I am an introvert and I don't do anything like that very well. Talking somebody into something was never my strong point, but, I decided, well now this is something I need to do. But you know that was when I got Patty Ryan to agree to be President after Lesley's several years as President. I really think I literally talked Patty into it, phone call by phone call. I just did it that one year.

Q: I see, but that was kind of a big fish you reeled in, right? (laughter)

BUSHNELL: I know, somehow I had a determination motivated by her marvelous capabilities.

Library of Congress

Q: Also you said that your husband was control officer for Jonestown, and I'm interested in hearing about that period and about some menacing phone calls you received.

BUSHNELL: Well in 1979, when Jim Jones orchestrated the mass suicide in Guyana, John was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. At the time the Sandinista crisis in Nicaragua was very demanding of the front office. So the Assistant Secretary took Nicaragua, and he gave Jonestown to John. For three weeks, virtually, John was home maybe five hours to sleep at night after he got some dinner down. During those three weeks he was in the Operations Center. He did press briefings on Jonestown so was often on TV. There was the murder of the American Congressman and that, of course, blew the thing into how big it got. Not that the massive suicide in itself wasn't. But, the Congressman who was murdered, I think his name was Ryan, had been in John's office just before he went, and John had advised him not to go. But, of course, the public didn't know this. So in the media, the State Department was the bad guy. I got a couple of phone calls which were a great surprise, and it was like "Mrs. Bushnell, how do you feel having a husband who is a murderer?"

Q: Were these anonymous or were they people you knew?

BUSHNELL: No, this was anonymous. And it was upsetting.

Q: So, just because you're in Washington doesn't mean that it isn't dangerous and upsetting.

BUSHNELL: Yes, it can have that dimension.

Q: What about the period during which I guess then President Carter established that new Panama Canal Commission with representation from the United States as well as Panama. And can you tell me a little bit about how your husband got selected by the then Secretary of State and then about your service as the wife of a Board Member?

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Well, when the 1977 treaty was signed by President Carter and General Torrijos of Panama, it was to be the beginning of the handover of the Canal over a period of years. It was the first time, I believe, that there would be any Panamanians on the Board of Directors. It was going to be five Americans and four Panamanians. Do you want me to tell how John got to be a member?

Q: Please.

BUSHNELL: The signing of the Treaty by Carter and Torrijos in 1977 provided the framework for the gradual turnover of the Canal to the Panamanians at the end of 1999. The first major involvement of the Panamanians in policy making was to be as members of the Board which set policy for the Canal enterprise. The Treaty specifies that there will be five American and four Panamanian members of the Board. Its sort of a humorous story how my husband became a member of the initial Board.

When the treaty was negotiated, US officials envisioned that all or most of the five American members would be government officials, mainly from Defense as was the old Canal Company, with a couple of members from State. However, in passing the necessary implementing legislation, those in Congress, particularly in the House, who opposed the Treaty tried to make trouble by requiring by law that one member of the board have long experience with ports, another with shipping, and a third with unions. In short, three members would be from the private sector and only two from the government. As Defense had expected to have at least three members on the Board, Defense wanted both official seats. State of course thought that this great diplomatic enterprise of a novel binational board required a State member. Twice the issue of Board membership was referred to President Carter. Both times he sent back a message that Secretaries Vance and Brown (Defense) should resolve it. There were several discussions between the departments and time was running out as the Panamanians had already nominated their members.

Library of Congress

Finally the issue was to be settled at one of the regular weekly Vance/Brown lunches between Vance and Brown. As briefed by his staff, Brown argued among other things that the two US official members must be really tough because the Panamanians had already nominated a communist and it would fall to the two official US members to handle four hostile Panamanians. Brown concluded that tough military types not diplomats were required. Vance agreed with what was needed, but then said he had one SOB left. No one has ever told me just what work experience he related, but Brown agreed that John, who was Vance's candidate, had the job.

And diplomatic skills were needed. John's main focus as a Board member was to build a good constructive relationship among the members so they would operate as nine individuals trying to implement the Treaty in the best possible way, not as two warring sides. Even before the first meeting he flew to Panama and called on each of the Panamanian Board members. He also felt that building personal relationships with the spouses of the Panamanian members would help minimize the inevitable frictions. Thus at least once a year I and other American spouses accompanied the Board members to Panama. Defense regularly provided an airplane so it was a very convenient first-class trip. I was the only American spouse who spoke Spanish, and some of the Panamanian spouses spoke little English and even those whose English is pretty good preferred Spanish. So they would invite me to do things with them in addition to the official dinners, visits, and such activities. This gave me lots of opportunities to build good relations at the personal level by showing appreciation for their culture and interest in their families. On one trip after we had moved to Buenos Aires, one board member, who was minister of public works, and his wife took us by small plane for a long weekend up into the mountains over half way to Costa Rica where they were building a big hydroelectric project. It was interesting, but challenging. I did not like the 1000s of feet drops off the narrow roads with no guard rails; and I did not go into the tunnel they were building. The members of the board did become friends, and a quite cooperative means of operating developed before Noriega became a major problem; by that time John had left the Board. Much later in 1990

Library of Congress

after Noriega had surrendered and I was able to join John, who had gone months earlier as Charge, some of the wives of former Panamanian board members were quick to invite me to lunch and help me settle into Panama.

And oh yes, I did get to put a ship through a lock. When we were visiting the control room in the middle of two locks, the operator showed me which levers to pull to close the gate behind the ship and fill the lock, raising the ship. Pushing another lever than opened the gate and the ship was pulled out into Gatun Lake to continue its transit.

Q: And he served for five years you said?

BUSHNELL: I think it was. Anyway four—yes, I think it was five actually.

Q: And then how is it that you had an experience and connection with that as the wife of a Board member?

BUSHNELL: Well, the other four American Board member wives didn't have any experience overseas as I had in the Foreign Service, fending for ourselves and so forth. Not like with the military who have housing, American goods commissaries provided, etc. I found many of the American Canal workers who had been as much as three or four generations in Panama, were having a terrible time with the idea that they were now going to go through a transition of not having so many privileges. What they had already started to do was to cut down on commissaries. They were going to cut back on what they were bringing in, and eventually close. And they were going to do this on a very slow scale, but it was already a tremendous impact on some of the wives of the members of the Canal employees who had virtually never known anything but living in the Canal Zone from the time they were born, and never going anywhere except to the commissaries to shop. This included clothes, mind you. It's not just food. They had never, I mean it's as if they had been living in Missouri and suddenly picked up and put there — nothing was different from where they had lived in Missouri. Now, all of a sudden, they might have to go out and actually buy something on the Panama economy. I found this just awfully

Library of Congress

hard to believe. I attended a luncheon given by the wife of the administrator of the Canal for we Board wives, and several of the wives that I'm talking about who were having a terrible time with this transition, and I just was challenged to keep my mouth shut a lot about what was being aired at that luncheon. And, you know, I already mentioned how much I enjoyed the pineapple in Costa Rica. Well, in Panama, the fruits, the mangoes, the avocado, the papaya, the pineapple, I mean it's just so wonderful, so superior to here. These people didn't eat them unless they were actually sold in the commissary. The idea of maybe getting something from the Panamanian economy and getting sick on it. Then at one point, I said to one woman, and these were lovely, lovely people that just were not able to cope with this situation: "What is it that you're not going to get from the commissary now that you can't otherwise buy, that you're going to have to do without — give me an example?" She said: "Well, they've cut out frozen asparagus." Taking a deep breath, I counted to five before I spoke, all the while thinking how I went years without asparagus of any sort". And that, to me, would have been a luxury anyway. There was another women who complained about having to take the train now, to go to Panama City to take her child to the orthodontist because there wouldn't be an orthodontist as convenient as there had been. Okay, so that's a little inconvenient, but this was just such a traumatic thing for them. It was something that in their way of living and the way they were taught to think about their situation was that this was their due. They were now deprived. Whereas in the Foreign Service, I think we look at it as welcoming cross-cultural experiences, certainly I did, that we are not — I don't know how to put it except that these people, I think, are the ones that have lost a lot by having such a different perspective.

Q: So was your purpose as a Board wife to hear these people out and try to make suggestions, or allow them to vent?

BUSHNELL: This was something that the Canal Administrator's wife decided to do. I think she saw that maybe they needed an opportunity to air some of their grievances. No, I wouldn't call it anything except something that if we could help, we would be glad to.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, I'm sure that's the very thing that can make a big difference is allowing people to get it out and talk about it and maybe realize that it's not the end of the world not to have asparagus and so I am sure that was more of a contribution than you realize. But moving right along, I would like to cover this State dinner that you had with the Reagans when the Prime Minister Seaga from Jamaica came. Could you tell us what that was like?

BUSHNELL: Well, that was a very special experience. It was quite an honor to be invited to a luncheon at the White House with the President and Mrs. Reagan in honor of a head of state, in this case the Prime Minister of Jamaica. And this, by the way, was the first official State visit that President and Mrs. Reagan were doing within a week of the Inauguration! John was the Acting Assistant Secretary at the time, so he was virtually the control officer for the Prime Minister. And I, for Mrs. Seaga. I remember so well, the Seagas arrival was the same night that the hostages who were just freed arrived in town.

Q: The Iranian hostages?

BUSHNELL: Yes. And it was just after the Inauguration, as you may recall, that the Iranians decided to wait till then to do this so that President Reagan, at least ceremonially, would get the credit and not President Carter who had done so much work in having this happen. If you recall, the District was all beautifully lit up for their return, as the lights had been dimmed to honor the hostages while they were held. Around the Lincoln Memorial there was a magnificent circle of dozens of blue spotlights going up and coming to a point way, way up high. And there were other beautiful, beautiful displays of lightings in other places around town as well. Anyway, that same evening the Seagas were arriving, and John and I had to go to National Airport to meet their plane. We, as a matter of fact, were formally dressed in white tie and long dress because the Reagans were receiving the Diplomatic Corps that evening and we had to be there after delivering the Seagas to Blair House where they would be staying. We took them into Blair House and enjoyed a juice drink, as I recall, as we showed them around. Then we said good-night and departed for

Library of Congress

the formal reception just across the street at the White House — a short but hasty walk as we were already late arriving.

But getting back to the airport arrivaafter boarding onto the plane and into first class, where their official escort by us was stipulated to begin, we were whisked-off hastily by the Secret Service Agents assigned to the Seagas. If you have ever noticed, you know the agents walk you very fast through a public area like an airport. Apparently a fast moving target is harder to hit. Anyway, I was seated in the second limousine with Mrs. Seaga, and Lenny Lawrence, our Ambassador to Jamaica, whom I did not know before that evening. So we get in the limousine, and we're coming around the Lincoln Memorial, and of course, here are all these gorgeous floodlights I mentioned. (It is a winter evening and dark out.) Mrs. Seaga is just delighted, and she exclaimed: "This is beautiful! You know Ann, I've been to Washington before, but not in many years, and somehow I don't remember it being so pretty." And I simply couldn't resist the temptation, and I said: "Well, you know, Mrs. Seaga, we did these lights specially for your visit." "Just look....." Then laughter after a pause and the ice was broken as the Ambassador discreetly jabbed me with his elbow. You know it took her a moment to recover as she nodded approvingly. Then came her elbow as I am seated in the middle and getting it from both sides now! More laughter. It was a good start to spending much time together in the upcoming few days.

Q: That is fantastic (laughter).

BUSHNELL: And then too, what was interesting about that visit was that the next day when President Reagan was meeting with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State and John, Mrs. Reagan had to do something to entertain the women. Since she was brand new in the White House, and unfamiliar with much of it, she had the head usher give us a tour of all the rooms that you don't normally get to except the living quarters. So we were in the library and we were everywhere, the oval office and what have you. And the room displaying the china. This tour guide, who was probably the most knowledgeable person about those rooms, gave us a two-hour, complete touwhat an absolutely wonderful gift for

Library of Congress

me to have been among the nine or ten of us that did this. Mrs. Seaga had a staff aide and Mrs. Johnson, wife of the Jamaican Ambassador to the U.S. with her, and on the U.S. side with yours truly was Mrs. George H.W. Bush, and Mrs. Al Haig, wives of Vice President and Secretary of State respectively. It was marvelous that Mrs. Seaga just happened to come along for me. (laughter)

Q: Well, so after this long period of time in Washington, you were off again to Latin America and five years in Buenos Aires during which you received the Ambassador's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism and I can see why. I see you did a lot and I'd like to talk about all of it! Your period of time you were an English language tutor; when you were Vice President of the American Women's Club; Program Coordinator of the Argentine Folk Choir; and the radio interviews — I guess you had a couple of those. So if you're ready, let's see if we can talk about some of those things and I'd appreciate it if you could flush it out.

BUSHNELL: Well, John was the DCM, and his, I guess his time as Charg# D'Affaires was collectively maybe a year. Because in our five years we had three different Ambassadors. Between an Ambassador leaving and a new one arriving there can easily be several months, not to mention the times an Ambassador is traveling while there. All in all there was probably more than a year when , as Charge, we were running TWO restaurants, not one! We did a great deal of entertaining, and we had, almost always, sit- down dinners for Argentine people. In our small but charming residence the dining room table comfortably sat 14. However, sometimes we squeezed in 16 or 17 people at the table. But it was a comfortable amount of people for the purpose of having meaningful conversations, and for that reason we always preferred this to a larger buffet or reception.

One of the main US objectives in Argentina was to promote the nascent democracy leading up to the election in 1983 and after the Alfonsin government took over. John believed that one of the problems in Argentina is that Argentines of different groups have no contact with other groups; this lack of communication causes an increase in

Library of Congress

misunderstanding and politics that are too confrontational. As diplomats, our home was neutral ground and we were able to get Argentines of different groups to know each other.

One of the most difficult groups was the military. Many officers had begun in military schools in first grade and continued until they were commissioned in the schools of their service. As junior officers they were then usually assigned to the more remote posts on the borders where the main eligible women were daughters of the senior officers. Even when assigned to Buenos Aires the officers had their own clubs and associated almost entirely with other military. John usually tried to include one senior military couple in each of our dinners; at first they would ask permission to come from their commanders. It was not unusual for one or another of our guests to tell me quietly as they were leaving, or at a later encounter, that the evening in our house was the first time they had ever had a real conversation with a senior officer, and they always commented that they were much nicer and more knowledgeable than our civilian guests had imagined. For example, one night after a dinner at our house Ambassador Ana Goyeneche, a career diplomat newly named Argentine ambassador to the UN in Europe, said to John: "I cannot believe I actually sat next to a Colonel at your table and he is really quite a reasonable person." Many of the most educated Argentines had also had no contact with Peronist leaders even though the Peronists were probably the largest political party - it was a party based on the blue collar workers. One night a senior Peronist regaled us with stories from his time in exile in Madrid with General Peron in the 1960's and how Peron kept Evita's coffin in the apartment and other strange happenings. Almost all the other guests were not Peronists, and, as the wine flowed, they eagerly questioned the nature and history of Peron and his party. The Peronist probably made no converts that evening, but all the Argentines learned quite a bit of their history and the non-Peronists developed at least one Peronist acquaintance. It is, of course, hard to say how much our effort helped promote democracy, but it is satisfying to me that Argentines have since elected a Peronist government and there has not been a successful military coup for the longest period in Argentine history.

Library of Congress

For me it was a marvelous experience. And it was work; often I knew almost none of the guests until they appeared at my door. John's excellent social secretary, Ernestina Acuna, would send home the guest list with a few notes to me about what each guest did. I worked hard to memorize all the names and titles so I could introduce the guests to one another and move conversations forward. Although I was fortunate in having excellent help, the logistics of entertaining two or three times a week (including stag luncheons) were a lot of work. Of course a great many Argentines had us back for small dinners in their homes — although not the military who only entertained at their clubs. As John said, I always had the more interesting part of the table because the senior males sat next to me at dinner while John had their wives. Sometimes, when the junior officers in the Embassy were doing biographic reporting, they would call me to get information on my dinner companions. In short the State Department got two for the price of one. By now my Spanish is quite fluent, thanks to being able to be back in Spanish class full time — an essential MUST for spouses.

Q: So what were the radio interviews about and I assume that they were done in Spanish?

BUSHNELL: They were. I met a friend, through my tutoring English, who was one of the producers of Channel 9. I told her that I really didn't think I ought to be interviewed on TV because that was just a little bit too much exposure without it being structured and without it being, maybe even approved, what with being official foreigners as guests in the country and John's position, etc., so she had me on radio. And I spoke for maybe almost a half an hour with a bit of known framework about my experience in the diplomatic service and then I switched (as I planned) to my delight to the topic of Argentina and elaborated on its many assets as I experienced them. With this I followed with a pitch about the need for their economy to have outside money that, you know, why don't they expand on their tourism and get the people in Japan that have the money, the people in Europe who have the money, the people in the United States who have the money to come, but they don't because they don't hear anything about what's in Argentina. And we talked about that and

Library of Congress

they taped it. I still have the tape. Sometimes when I'm feeling blue, I'll plug it in and go on a bit of an ego trip . My own little story about this is that John's chauffeur drove me to the interview and waited in the car downstairs, and, of course, heard it on the radio while I was doing it. When I got back in the car I asked him: "Well, what did you think of it?" And he said: "Well, to tell you the truth, Senora, you did better than I thought you'd do." Now right away there was a slam on my Spanish because he must have thought my Spanish was so bad (how will she ever do this). (laughter). So, I guess it wasn't too bad after all.

Q: Were both of the interviews on the same...

BUSHNELL: The other interview was interesting. Our Ambassador's wife was out of the country at the time, or she would have done it. So the Ambassador asked me if I would take her place to explain the Christmas traditions in our country. The program was about Christmas in different countries, and Ambassador's wives from different countries were on the program to discuss their own. So I did that. Funny thing, as I planned what I would say about our traditions, I discovered that the Spanish language has no word for "cranberry!"

Q: Did you get any fan mail?

BUSHNELL: No (laughter).

Q: Can you tell me about your English language tutor experience. Were there rewards from that? What was it like?

BUSHNELL: Indeed, my next door neighbor in Argentina, an Argentine who was a graduate of Brown University, was an English teacher at the Binational Center. She suddenly asked me one day if I would be interested in going with her and to help out as a native English speaker, which she thought would be a big hit. She went on Tuesday nights, just for conversation with advanced students. Well I went, and it was a big hit . Being a native English speaker was the trick. And I started to go on a weekly basis. It quickly became so popular that I ended-up having to get two more native English

Library of Congress

speakers. And with three of us they needed to provide us with two more rooms. One of these students, a 19 year old pre-med student, was just absolutely fired up over this opportunity and doing very well. Suddenly into a new semester I noticed he wasn't showing-up. And I called Blanca, the head of the Binational Center, and asked her to give me Guillermo's home number so that I might ask him what night he could come. That marked the beginning of soon thereafter having three advanced students come to my house on a fixed evening every week for the rest of my stay there.. These three Argentines made great progress, I think largely due to their inter-competitiveness. It was a marvelous experience; in those two or three hour weekly sessions I consider that I actually received more than I gave. I got to know their families a little, and to this day we all correspond. I added a couple more here and there, so actually had four for probably more than two and a half years , besides going to the Binational Center weekly.

Q: What about serving as Vice President of the American Women's Club? What was that like?

BUSHNELL: Well, the American Women's Club is very popular, it is very large in Argentina. The American Ambassador's wife is asked to be a part of it, if only honorarily, since her attendance means a lot to them. I was asked to be in some role in her absence. When my two sons had graduated from high school and I was freer, they made me Vice President. As with most Vice President jobs, one doesn't really have much to do except be there; so it was easy for me and it seemed to mean a lot to them. And I enjoyed it.

Q: Were they charity driven?

BUSHNELL: They had some of that. But they were more social, really. It was a morale thing for many of the people who were living in Argentina all their lives but somehow connected with either the English language or The United States.

Q: Well, that's important. What about coordinating the Argentine Folk Choir?

Library of Congress

BUSHNELL: Oh, well, this is interesting too. The American Women's Club every month would have a program with a speaker. At Christmas they always had a music program. I had suffered through a couple of those. They really, really needed a little life. I went to mass every Sunday evening in the parish church down the street from me — an Argentine parish. Their youth choir was just absolutely a treasure. They were not professional and only 15 to 23 years of age, a group of maybe ten people. Guitar, sometimes a second instrument. I never failed to love their beautiful harmonious singing. So I went to the rectory one day, and I said to the secretary: "I want to find out who can I contact from the youth choir of the 8:30 mass on Sunday night." She said: "I'm the mother of Rodrigo, who is the head of it". I said: "Oh". And I told her why. She said: "But you know, Senora, they never do anything like this — they never sing outside of church." "Well" I said, "Now I'm going to ask them if they will." I did. I got the Embassy to help me by providing a van and I picked them all up and took them to the American Women's Club for the Christmas program downtown. I went in the van with them and, during the long drive downtown, I said: "C'mon you have to practice now." Talk about shy! Never, never having known anybody but a native Spanish speaker and you know, this is like, they can't believe this is happening. Finally they ask: "What do you want us to play Senora?" And I said: "Well my favorite song you do is....." and they played it. They gave an outstanding program. They played "One Day at a Time", which they sang in English, and they introduced each number in English beautifully. They brought down the house. They must have done three or four encores. Every year since, I think they have been back. Anyway, I then started to take them to the American Embassy — the Women's Group meetings Christmas program, and they played. Then I just have to tell you one thing that happened because it's touching to me. When I was in the States, at one point my mother was quite ill, and I had to stay with her longer than I had planned, which prevented me from attending a function at the Embassy at which I had scheduled them to sing. Of course they went. At the end of the program they announced: "Now we would like to do one song which we are dedicating to our Madrina, Senora. Bushnell." (Madrina is the word for Godmother in Spanish, and that's what they called me.) They sang the same song; they remembered that it was my favorite,

Library of Congress

the one that I had asked them to practice in that first van ride. That was very touching when I heard about it. So again, what sometimes seems like a big help I think I am doing for others, ends up turned around with finding myself on the receiving end. I received so much joy from my experiences with them

Q: Can you tell us about official entertaining you did on your own?

BUSHNELL: In connection with our entertaining officially, when CODELS would come through, or VIP's from the United States, who were there officially, the Ambassador would usually have a luncheon, the first or second day, with appropriate Argentine counterparts. However, there was no place at the Ambassador's residence for the wives to be entertained at the same time, and John was thinking that these wives are just kind of drifting with no direction in an unfamiliar area, just shopping and what have you. Why don't we see if we can get them to meet with some Argentines that they would be particularly interested in meeting. So what we did then was send a cable up to the Department and asked if the ladies would be interested if Mrs. Bushnell offered a luncheon for the wives at the same time the Ambassador was having their husbands, and if so, what were their interests — Mrs. Bushnell would have Argentine ladies who speak English that they might find with mutual interests. The first time the answer was yes; we got CODEL Roth, headed by the Congressman from Wisconsin. One lady in the group was a Psychiatrist, and Mrs. So and So from Georgia an artist, and we're getting these women defined. I invited Argentine women who spoke English and in fact included the wife of the head of the Fulbright Commission in Argentina, Amalia, who is bi-lingual and a prominent Argentine artist. It was always nice to have Amalia anyway, So we worked to link-up the wives of visiting delegations with Argentine women having similar interests through a luncheon at my residence. It was just wonderful. I really felt like I was accomplishing something on my own. We continued to do that for all future CODELS and it was very useful. I know of cases where people have kept in touch after that first encounter..

Library of Congress

Q: Well, all of these good deeds in Buenos Aires resulted in the Ambassador's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism. Was that quite a moment for you to receive that?

BUSHNELL: Oh, it was a complete surprise. He awarded it to me at a farewell dinner. Yes, I was there long enough, five years, to get really involved. And I had the support I needed to be able to do things. There was a good staff in the house that took care of so many things.

Q: So you left with a wonderful recognition and back to the District of Columbia again. And you got involved right away with the AAFSW again serving as Treasurer of the Book fair and I know that's got to be a big job. And you were second Vice President of AAFSW during that period. Do you recall whether 1988, was a good year for being the Treasurer and how did you do in that job. Was it overwhelming, take a lot of time?

BUSHNELL: The Book fair, of course, is totally absorbing, and we did very well, as I recall, that year. Well, I had support. Yes, I enjoyed it.

Q: Was there any sort of major accomplishment while you were Vice President during the 1989-90 year?

BUSHNELL: I really don't recall anything in particular.

Q: OK And then, one year back in Panama. How did that happen?

BUSHNELL: Well, in 1989, before our "Just Cause" operation when the U.S. military went into Panama because General Noriega had illegally blocked the legally elected President who never got to serve. Our Ambassador there was recalled because Noriega had taken over illegally. In October of that year, three months before the invasion, or the military operation I think they want to call it, they asked John to go down as the Charge. He did, and, of course we families of the diplomats could not go. And that was difficult. Actually that was a lot more difficult for me than the telephone call over Jonestown because I was

Library of Congress

only finding things out from reading the newspaper. For example, I read that there was a bomb thrown into the Embassy, into John's embassy office, through the window, and it landed on the chair where he sat which was where it was aimed. BUT, he wasn't in his office at the time. I read that in the paper. So that was stressful, and I'm sure the Marine guards could have done without me calling at ten o'clock that night or when he was hard to find, which seemed to be always, because of what was going on in the ensuing days of the military action that December. But in February I did get to go down after Noriega was captured, and things quieted down. Then we were soon transferred out as John was named to be the Ambassador to Costa Rica. But that nomination dragged on mercilessly and politically for what seemed the longest eleven months I ever spent. Senator Helms did one of his usual "shooting down career Foreign Service Officers"—just more of the same rhetoric about what he did to John ten years earlier when he was named by President Carter to go to Chile as Ambassador. That time it was that John could be blamed for giving away Nicaragua to the Sandinistas, as if it was John's policy and not that of the current administration. The Senator wanted it made clear Bushnell could get nothing any time. There were rumors about the Senator's Foreign Policy Aide wanting the job and that Secretary Baker wouldn't give-in to her either so they compromised on someone else entirely.

Q: Well, Mr. Helms is now making it difficult for Mr. Weld, so, it's nothing new. He's true to his own character isn't he? So finally, during the period from 1991 to present, you've continued to serve AAFSW in the Evacuation Support Network person?

BUSHNELL: Right.

Q: Is that a big job?

BUSHNELL: No, no it wasn't for me because I'd only been called once to assist someone who was evacuated, and when she got to this country she didn't really need me. But of course it could be depending on the circumstances.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, you're available if someone needs help. Let me ask you one thing in retrospect. We didn't talk too much about training other than language training. But did you go through the Wives Seminar as a young spouse of a junior officer and did that help you at all? Do you recall the Wives Seminar and -

BUSHNELL: Not when I first went overseas. On second thought, I guess I did actually. There was an area orientation, I think that is what we went to.

Q: You didn't go to the Wives Seminar?

BUSHNELL: No, area orientation only. When we were going to go to Chile as Ambassador and again when we were going to go to Costa Rica as Ambassador, we went through the Ambassadorial Orientation (was it two weeks I think?) that they have which is usually set up before you're confirmed.

Q: Well, the Wives Seminar a two-week class, and it came about in the 1960's and many, many spouses went through it and they went through all the protocol, the kind of thing you talked about—calling cards and other things that would make people more comfortable in the sort of...

BUSHNELL: Well, I don't remember that there was so much focus on that as I was only here two months between getting married and going overseas for our first foreign assignment.

Q: So, how do you feel about all the years that you spent in the Service. If you had it to do over again, would you?

BUSHNELL: Oh, I think of it as a wonderful experience, especially the cross-cultural experiences of living abroad and the priceless advantage of learning to speak other languages. It is never easy to travel with infants and toddlers, and especially difficult on home leave to be staying with little ones with even the kindest of family members.

Library of Congress

But it is a career and life experience together with my husband and children that can be summed-up for me as well worth it. I would probably do a few things differently. I had one experience in 1965, before CLO, that told me that CLO can be a tremendous asset. I was evacuated from the Dominican Republic in a civil war, with an infant of six weeks and a toddler. We didn't have any papers from the State Department yet that the infant, Mark, was born a U.S. citizen, and of course he had no passport. Somehow getting him into the States was no problem. Two months later, when suddenly I am told by my husband that I can come back, I will tell you I had one HUGE problem. No passport for Mark, no travel! And I'm in New Jersey and my husband's in Santo Domingo. I do not know how many phone calls to the State Department and to New York Passport Office were made before I finally called Tony Solomon who was Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs and had stayed with John in our house during the early weeks of the crisis. He had someone of his staff work on the problem until it was solved. I mainly remember it was a nightmare for me. If there were a CLO, maybe this would have been a breeze. Finally, they put the baby on my passport, in the New York passport office, only after I made a sworn statement that the baby was actually registered in the Embassy in Santo Domingo, and with my brother-in-law, an FBI Agent, at my side to give sworn testimony that I am who I am. Only later did I discover that the baby's birth was not actually registered. Anyway, with the country on the brink of, and in war, I am sure my husband and the Embassy never gave the registration any priority, or even thought of it for that matter. But you know, we make progress. We have a CLO office today. The way I was brought up, regardless of how many support groups are or aren't there for you, you're still going to be a family living and working together — wife, mother, hostess etc. wherever you live. I guess going along as John's wife was something I was supposed to be doing. Actually I never thought of doing otherwise. Therefore, the absence of a CLO, the being rated in an efficiency report, those things were not highlighted as positive or negative so much as this was life. And I got a lot out of it, and there were a lot of difficulties, but you know, we made it.

Q: You surely did. Well thank you very much.

Library of Congress

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: John A. Bushnell

Spouse's Position: DAS - Treasury, DAS - State, DCM-Charge

Spouse Entered Service: 1959 Left Service: 1992 You Entered Service: 1962 Left Service: 1992

Status: Spouse of Retiree

Posts: 9/62-11/62 Washington, DC 11/62-7/64 Bogota 1964- 1965 Santo Domingo 1965-1968 San Jose, C.R. 1969- 1971 Geneva 1971 -1974 NSC - Washington, DC 1974 - 1976 DAS Treasury, Washington, DC 1976 - 1977; Senior Seminar, Washington, DC 1977 - 1982 DAS - ARA, Washington, DC 1982 - 1987 Buenos Aires 1987 - 1989 Washington, DC 1989 - 1990 Panama 1990 - 1992 Washington, DC

Place/Date of birth: Scotch Plains, N.J.

Maiden Name: Morel

Parents (Name, Profession): Anne Cahil homemaker John J. Morel - Plumbing & Heating Co.

Schools (Prep, University): Mount St. Mary's Academy Good Counsel College Marymount University

Date/Place of Marriage: 9/2/62 in Scotch Plains, N.J.

Children:

Library of Congress

John

Mark

Timothy

Profession: Foreign Service Wife - ESL Teacher

Positions held (Please specify Volunteer or Paid): A. At Post: President, AAFSW in San Jose, C.R. - 2 yrs; English Language Tutor - Binational Ctr., Buenos Aires - 3 yrs. Vice President, American Women's Club, Buenos Aires - 3 yrs; Program Coordinator, Argentine Folk Choir, Buenos Aires - 3 yrs; Public radio interviews, Buenos Aires - twice.

B. In Washington, DC: AAFSW Board - Language Groups Coordinator, 1973-1977. Book fair Treasurer, 1988. Nominating Committee Chairman, 1978. Second Vice President, 1989-1990. Assistant Book fair treasurer (at Book fair) several years. Evacuation Support Network, 1991 - present. Wife of board member, Panama Canal Commission, 1979-1985.

Honors (Scholastic, FS): Ambassador's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism, 1987.

End of interview